



By
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A few days into the recovery from the Joplin tornado,

Tara and Lily were assigned to search what was left of St. John's Hospital. They needed to go to the roof, they were told, though it was unclear whether the building was structurally sound. The tornado hit the hospital dead on. There had been a scramble to save patients the night of the storm.

A group of firefighters surrounded Lily and Tara in a tight circle as they ascended the remains of the hospital's stairs. The windows were blown out, and holes were torn in the walls.

Heights frightened Tara, but they didn't scare Lily.

In the heat of the search, she sniffed everywhere, intent on her target. Tara clung to her dog with a taut leash, lest Lily stray too close to a gaping hole. Tara's stomach lurched as she climbed up and up toward the roof of what was left of St. John's.

Tara remembered cradling her daughter, right there, on the third floor where she was born.

The search team reached the roof, and for the first time Tara saw the full scope of the damage. There was destruction as far as she could see. No buildings, no trees. There was mud. There was lumber. Whole lives and livelihoods lay in catastrophic ruin before her.

Her breath caught in her throat. Her mind could not fathom that this was her home. She started to have doubts. How was Joplin going to come back from this?

Everything had changed.

That evening, after searching St. John's, Tara and Lily returned home. Tara showered, changed out of her dusty, sweat-soaked clothes and walked with

CHAPTER 7: Searching St. John's

her dogs out onto the porch. Jeff was still gone. He worked day and night. The kids were with his parents.

That evening, it was just Tara Prosser and her Weimaraners. The grass of the yard was green from all of the rain, and the dogs ran out to play on it, chasing each other in circles, Lily, still exuberant despite a day of working through the wreckage.



Only one month before that evening Lily had almost died. Now she romped across the yard. She panted and ran and rolled about as if nothing else mattered. She could spend entire days searching for death and still come home and find some measure of bliss.

Tara was tired. She let a few tears slide down her cheeks. She watched what she had almost lost. She thought about what she and so many other Joplin residents actually had.

She called the dogs to come inside. She needed to wash her clothes and give the pups their dinner. She needed to talk to her kids and finish a few dishes. Normal things.

A long day lay ahead of her tomorrow. She and Lily had work to do.



Nine months after Tara and Lily climbed to the roof of St. John's Hospital, the pair received a surprise. Tara learned that Lily was nominated for the 2012 Hero Dog Awards sponsored by the American Humane Association.

The Hero Dog Awards were created by the AHA to recognize the extraordinary bond shared by people and their dogs. The award is presented nationally in eight categories.

Lily was a finalist in the Search and Rescue Dog category for her brave and relentless work in Joplin following the tornado. Being a finalist was a measure of recognition for all that Lily had done for her hometown.

The Hero Dog Award nomination was even more special for Tara because her mother had nominated them for the honor just a few weeks before she passed away. Tara's mother, the dog trainer, who had been such an inspiration to Tara's search and rescue (SAR) work, offered Tara and Lily the gift of national recognition for all that they do.

Lily exemplifies what it means to be a hero dog. She worked tirelessly after the storm to help Joplin begin its recovery. Every step and effort made an impact on Joplin moving forward.

Dig A Little Deeper!



Lily was honored with the Hero Dog Award nomination. Visit the Hero Dog Award website: herodogawards.org and read about recent finalists. Which dog would you choose to receive the award and why?

In the News: Heroes come in all shapes and forms. Lily was a hero, even though she is a dog. Use the newspaper to find an example of a hero. Why would you classify that person as a hero? If you could honor him or her with an award, what would it be and why?

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